Large concentrations of White-winged Black Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* at Lutembe Bay, Lake Victoria

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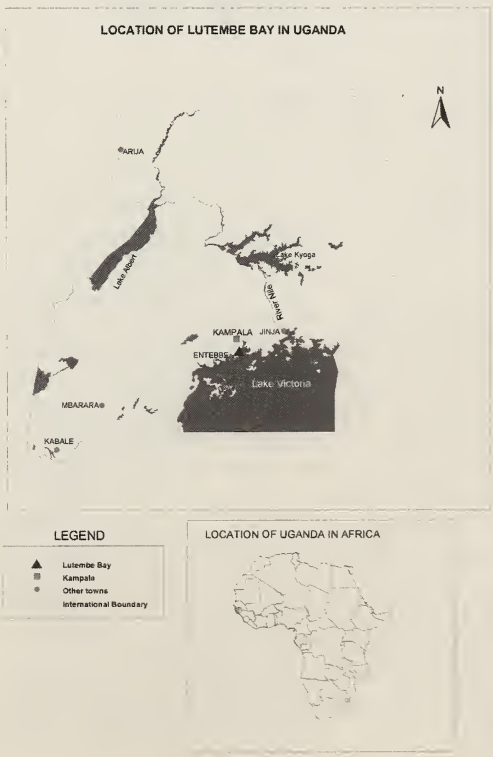
Un nombre extrêmement important de Guifettes leucoptères *Chlidonias leucopterus* a été observé ces dernières années à Lutembe Bay, sur la rive ougandaise du Lac Victoria. Des dénombrements faits le soir ont révélé l'importance de ce site pour l'espèce. Les effectifs les plus importants étaient de c2,5 millions d'oiseaux, au début du mois de décembre 1999, et de 2 millions, en février–mars 2000. A cela il faut ajouter un million d'oiseaux dénombrés à Maramba Bay, mi–mars 2000. Récemment, 1,5 million d'oiseaux ont été rapportés du Parc National Reine Elizabeth, en Ouganda occidental. La population mondiale, qui était précédemment estimée à 1,25–1,5 million d'oiseaux, paraît donc avoir été sérieusement sous-estimée. Les méthodes utilisées pour dénombrer les oiseaux au dortoir à Lutembe Bay sont examinées.

Lutembe Bay lies on the Ugandan shore of Lake Victoria, c15 km north-east of Entebbe and on the west side of Murchison Bay. It is a shallow, papyrus-fringed bay of c5 km^2 with numerous low mud islands and is important for a variety of tern, gull and other waterbird species. In 1999 NatureUganda identified it as one of Uganda's 30 Important Bird Areas (IBAs), on the strength of large concentrations of White-winged Black *Chlidonias leucopterus* and Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica* and records of two Near-threatened species, Papyrus Gonolek *Laniarius mufumbiri* and Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex*[1]. Large flocks of Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* use the bay and there is an unconfirmed report of Papyrus Yellow Warbler *Chloropeta gracilirostris* from the site, which is considered Vulnerable. Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*, a mainly coastal species, has also been increasing in numbers at Lutembe since 1998[2].

Until October 1999 regular waterbird counts were undertaken in the morning at Lutembe, when up to c200,000 White-winged Black Tern were recorded. Subsequently, evening counts have revealed the true importance of the bay's mud islands as roost sites for the species. Numbers rose from c1 million, in November 1999, to a peak of c2.5 million, in early December 1999, and 2 million in February–March 2000. An additional 1 million were estimated at Mabamba Bay, c15 km away, on one evening in mid-March 2000. These extremely high totals give credence to an earlier record of c1 million White-winged Black Terns at Lutembe (by AB)[4] and a recent report from Queen Elizabeth National Park, western Uganda, of a flock of 1.5 million[5]. These totals also indicate that an estimated world population of 1.25–1.5 million and the Asia/African flyway total of c250,000[3] are massive underestimates.

Lutembe Bay is a difficult area to count accurately. There are 20–30 mud islands depending on the water level. Because of the fringing swamp and local topography there is no high vantage point close enough to count from, so one has to count island-by-island from a boat. The low angle of view makes it easy to underestimate numbers of resting birds, while flocks on the wing are so large and fast moving as to be impossible to accurately estimate. Therefore, while



Map of Uganda showing the position of Lutembe Bay, Lake Victoria

satisfied that our counts are of the right order of magnitude, we are seeking to improve their accuracy. Counting birds as they come in to roost at the mouth of the bay is very difficult because flocks frequently fly back out over Lake Victoria before settling for the night. Nonetheless, it was possible to detect birds against the night sky and we estimated their numbers as they flew past according to units of time and then multiplied this by the total period over which birds were observed arriving at the roost site. Apart from aerial photography of the entire roost site, our best chance of obtaining better estimates may be to use a good high-speed SLR camera to photograph flocks on individual islands as they take flight. Counts from the photos could then be compared with estimates of the same flock at rest immediately before.

The overall number and variety of waterbirds at Lutembe offer a dramatic wildlife spectacle close to Kampala making it a potential site for ecotourism. The question of how to provide suitable viewing points without increasing disturbance must be addressed. The site is unprotected and horticultural and tourist development around the bay pose potential threats.

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Occurrence of Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus* at non-forest feeding sites in South Africa: threats to a declining population

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Il est estimé que moins de 500 individus du Perroquet robuste *Poicephalus robustus* survivent dans les forêts montagnardes du sud-est de l'Afrique du Sud. L'espèce est menacée par la destruction de son habitat, la persécution mal intentionnée, la capture pour le commerce illégal et, peut-être, par des maladies. Cette espèce principalement forestière se nourrit également en dehors du milieu forestier; ce comportement a été observé dans toute la zone de distribution et est probablement lié à une pénurie saisonnière de fruits en forêt. Des petits rassemblements à certains sites, dont l'importance est mise en lumière, pourraient être constitués d'oiseaux provenant d'un aire plus vaste. À cette époque, l'espèce est particulièrement vulnérable et menacée par la persécution des braconniers. La disparition d'un petit nombre d'individus pourrait avoir un effet négatif significatif sur les chances de survie à long terme de l'espèce dans la nature.

Introduction

Cape (Brown-necked) Parrot *Poicephalus robustus* occurs in a discontinuous belt through the naturally fragmented indigenous forests of south-eastern South Africa, from Fort Beaufort in Eastern Cape Province to the Karkloof of KwaZulu-Natal Province[17]. A relict population is found 600 km north in forests on the eastern escarpment around Tzaneen, Mpumalanga Province[6,17]. Its distribution was possibly once continuous, as historical records for regions between these two populations exist[22]. Like many other parrot species, habitat destruction and capture of birds for illegal trade have resulted in population declines[14]. Additional threats to wild populations include disease and shooting of birds as pests[14].

Of recent concern has been the report of Cape Parrots being shot or captured at feeding sites away from indigenous forest patches. 'Problem birds' causing significant damage to commercial pecan-nut crops have been shot. Recently, at a site in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands, c20 individuals were reportedly captured at an orchard, but prosecution of the alleged perpetrators was unsuccessful. With c200 birds in the area, this may have significant implications on wild populations.

Skead[12] estimated as few as 600 Cape Parrots remaining in the Eastern Cape and recent estimates of the total wild Cape Parrot population are of no more than 1,000 birds, with possibly fewer than 500[5,7]. However, misconceptions persist, with overly optimistic impressions of the number of remaining birds being garnered from the occurrence of large flocks at profitable food sources[20]. These gatherings occur away from forests and can involve flocks of up to 200 individuals[20].

A study in KwaZulu-Natal noted that Cape Parrot is a dietary specialist, feeding mainly on yellowwoods *Podocarpus* spp.[21]. Though Cape Parrot is an Afromontane forest specialist[10,15], it has adapted to using exotic and indigenous food sources outside forests[18]. In addition, dead yellowwoods, especially Outeniqua Yellowwood *P. falcatus*, are used as socialising points in forests and natural cavities as nesting sites[20]. Yellowwoods were formerly heavily logged and the effects of this activity are probably evident. Food trees have been reduced in many forests and there are few extant large dead trees capable of providing appropriate nest cavities for this relatively large parrot. Also, South African Afromontane forests have irregular fruit production and occasional periods of low food productivity[8,16,21]. Cape Parrot is therefore reliant on additional food sources during such periods[21]. Here, we highlight the importance of pecan-nut and alternative food sources in the diet of Cape Parrot, and the consequences of large flocks gathering at these and other feeding sites.

Methods

Flock size of Cape Parrot was recorded at a pecan-nut orchard (c4 trees) in Donnybrook, KwaZulu-Natal since 1998 (P St Pern pers comm). Additional and historical records gathered during our involvement in Cape Parrot research since 1994 were also collated. The implications of these gatherings outside forest were investigated.